

The Role of Work-Life Balance in Employee Retention: A Systematic Literature Review among Millennials and Generation Z

Andi Harnas Baharuddin

Indonesian Muslim University, Indonesia

Email: andi.harnas050290@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Employee retention has become a critical strategic concern for organizations navigating a workforce increasingly composed of Millennials and Generation Z, two cohorts widely known for prioritizing balance between professional and personal life over traditional incentives such as salary alone. This study conducts a systematic literature review examining the role of work-life balance in shaping employee retention among these two generational cohorts. Following PRISMA 2020 guidelines, twenty-five peer-reviewed articles published between 2021 and 2026 were identified, screened, and thematically synthesized from Google Scholar, Scopus-indexed journals, and other reputable academic repositories. The review reveals that work-life balance consistently exerts a significant positive influence on employee retention, primarily through the mediating roles of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job embeddedness, while simultaneously reducing turnover intention. Flexible arrangements, supportive leadership, employer branding, and compensation emerge as key reinforcing mechanisms. Notable generational nuances are identified: Millennials value stability and career progression alongside balance, whereas Generation Z emphasizes autonomy, mental well-being, and purpose-driven work. This review contributes a novel integrative, generation-differentiated framework linking work-life balance to retention outcomes and offers practical implications for human resource strategies, including flexible scheduling, welfare benefits, and generation-sensitive retention programs. Limitations and future research directions are discussed.

Keywords: work-life balance; employee retention; Millennials; Generation Z; systematic literature review; turnover intention.

INTRODUCTION

The composition of the global workforce has undergone a profound generational shift over the past decade. Millennials, born roughly between 1981 and 1996, and Generation Z, born from 1997 onward, together now represent the majority of active employees in most industries and are projected to dominate the labor market well into the next two decades (Isiaka & Whyte, 2026). Unlike previous generations who often prioritized job security, salary progression, and hierarchical career advancement, these two cohorts have consistently signaled a different set of expectations from their employers, chief among them being a sustainable balance between work responsibilities and personal life (Milawati et al., 2026; Sulistiyan et al., 2026). This shift is not merely anecdotal; large-scale global workforce surveys



have repeatedly confirmed that work-life balance ranks among the top considerations when Millennials and Generation Z choose, stay with, or leave an employer, alongside concerns about mental health, purpose, and flexibility.

Employee retention, defined broadly as an organization's ability to keep valuable employees committed and engaged over time, has therefore become an urgent strategic priority. High turnover imposes substantial direct and indirect costs on organizations, including recruitment expenses, lost productivity, disrupted team dynamics, and erosion of institutional knowledge (Masood, 2024). These costs are magnified when the departing employees belong to generational cohorts that already exhibit historically higher job mobility and lower organizational tenure than their predecessors. Indeed, several studies have documented alarmingly high turnover intentions among Generation Z employees across sectors ranging from retail and hospitality to auditing and start-ups, with work-life imbalance repeatedly cited as a proximate cause (Qodriyah & Dwianto, 2026; Shibalatani & Hapompwe, 2025). Against this backdrop, work-life balance has emerged not merely as an employee welfare issue but as a core lever of retention strategy that human resource practitioners must understand and operationalize.

Work-life balance itself is a multidimensional construct, generally understood as the degree to which an individual is able to simultaneously fulfill their occupational and non-occupational roles without excessive conflict, strain, or spillover between domains. Contemporary conceptualizations extend beyond simple time allocation to encompass psychological detachment from work, autonomy over scheduling, and the availability of organizational support mechanisms such as flexible hours, remote work options, and leave policies (Rosita et al., 2024). Empirical research across diverse national contexts, including Indonesia, Nigeria, Tanzania, Zambia, and Portugal, has consistently linked stronger perceived work-life balance to higher job satisfaction, deeper organizational commitment, and reduced turnover intention (Silaban & Margaretha, 2021; Lumelezi, 2026; Alves et al., 2024). At the same time, a growing body of literature has begun to probe the mechanisms through which this relationship operates, implicating mediators such as job embeddedness, employee engagement, and psychological attachment, as well as moderators such as employer branding, career development opportunities, and generational identity itself (Hendriana et al., 2023; Tanoto & Tami, 2024; Gustina et al., 2025).

Despite this expanding body of knowledge, the existing literature remains fragmented in several important respects. First, many prior studies examine work-life balance and retention within a single generational cohort, typically either Millennials or Generation Z in isolation, making it difficult to discern whether the mechanisms linking balance to retention are generation-specific or broadly generalizable (Waworuntu et al., 2022; Sari et al., 2025). Second, much of the existing empirical work is geographically dispersed and methodologically heterogeneous, spanning quantitative surveys, qualitative case studies, and mixed-method designs conducted in vastly different institutional and cultural settings, from Islamic education institutions in Indonesia to audit firms in Zambia and start-ups more broadly (Putra et al., 2026; Al-Idrus et al., 2026). This heterogeneity, while enriching, has not yet been systematically synthesized into a coherent, cross-generational framework. Third, the post-pandemic labor market has introduced new phenomena,

such as “quiet quitting” and heightened demand for hybrid and remote arrangements, that have reshaped how younger employees perceive and negotiate work-life boundaries, yet reviews that incorporate this most recent wave of literature, particularly studies published between 2023 and 2026, remain scarce (Xueyun et al., 2023).

This study addresses these gaps by conducting a systematic literature review that explicitly compares and integrates findings across both Millennial and Generation Z cohorts, drawing on twenty-five peer-reviewed studies published primarily within the last five years. The novelty of this review is threefold. First, rather than treating Millennials and Generation Z as a single undifferentiated “younger workforce,” this review explicitly maps points of convergence and divergence between the two cohorts in how work-life balance translates into retention outcomes, offering a comparative lens that is largely absent from prior single-generation reviews. Second, this review synthesizes the mediating and moderating architecture surrounding the work-life balance-retention relationship, consolidating disparate findings on job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job embeddedness, employer branding, compensation, and career development into a single integrative model, rather than reporting a simple bivariate association. Third, by incorporating literature published as recently as 2026, including studies examining post-pandemic phenomena such as quiet quitting and hybrid work arrangements, this review captures contemporary shifts in how younger employees define and negotiate work-life boundaries that earlier reviews, some conducted before or during the pandemic, could not anticipate.

The stakes of resolving this fragmentation are not merely academic. Organizations across industries report that recruitment and onboarding costs for a single mid-level employee can reach several months of salary, and these costs are compounded when replacement employees themselves depart within the first year, a pattern increasingly common among Generation Z new hires (Masood, 2024). Human resource departments have responded with an expanding menu of interventions, ranging from four-day work weeks and unlimited leave policies to hybrid and fully remote arrangements, yet the evidence on which specific configurations of work-life balance most effectively promote retention, and for which generational cohort, remains scattered across dozens of standalone studies that rarely reference one another across disciplinary or geographic boundaries. A systematic, comparative synthesis is therefore both timely and necessary to consolidate this fragmented evidence base into actionable guidance.

Moreover, the theoretical underpinnings of the work-life balance-retention relationship have themselves evolved considerably. Early conceptualizations drew heavily on role conflict theory, framing work-life imbalance as a zero-sum competition for finite time and energy between occupational and family roles. More recent scholarship, however, has incorporated conservation of resources theory and job embeddedness theory to explain why work-life balance influences retention not simply through reduced conflict, but through the cultivation of broader psychological and social resources, including a sense of fit, community, and sacrifice cost associated with leaving an organization (Rosita et al., 2024; Tanoto & Tami, 2024). This theoretical evolution parallels a generational shift in how work-life balance is experienced: whereas Millennials often frame balance in terms of discrete

boundaries between designated work hours and personal time, Generation Z, having come of age with pervasive digital connectivity and hybrid schooling during the pandemic, appears to conceptualize balance more holistically as an integration of purpose, autonomy, and well-being across all domains of life (Xueyun et al., 2023; Pózner & Kozák, 2025). Capturing this evolving theoretical and generational landscape requires a review that is both conceptually integrative and temporally current, which this study aims to provide.

Although previous studies have established a positive relationship between work-life balance and employee retention, important gaps remain in understanding how this relationship differs between Millennials and Generation Z. Existing reviews have often examined younger employees as a relatively homogeneous group or have focused on individual mechanisms such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, or job embeddedness. In addition, the rapid changes in post-pandemic work arrangements, including hybrid work and changing expectations regarding autonomy and well-being, have created new conditions that are not sufficiently captured in earlier reviews.

Therefore, this review seeks to provide a more integrated and generation-sensitive understanding of the work-life balance-retention relationship by comparing Millennials and Generation Z within a single analytical framework. In particular, the review connects direct relationships with mediating and moderating mechanisms while considering recent developments in the post-pandemic workplace. This approach is expected to clarify both the common and distinct retention drivers of the two cohorts and provide a stronger basis for designing generation-responsive human resource strategies.

Accordingly, this review is guided by three research questions: (1) What is the nature and strength of the relationship between work-life balance and employee retention among Millennials and Generation Z as reported in the existing empirical literature? (2) Through which mediating and moderating mechanisms does work-life balance influence retention outcomes for these two cohorts? (3) What generational similarities and differences characterize this relationship, and what practical implications follow for human resource management? The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 details the systematic review methodology, including the search strategy, eligibility criteria, and screening process, illustrated through a PRISMA flow diagram. Section 3 presents the results and discussion, synthesizing findings across the twenty-five reviewed studies and situating them within a proposed integrative framework, supported by a summary table of key studies. Section 4 concludes the paper with theoretical and practical implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

METHODOLOGY

Search strategy and data sources. This study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) approach guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 statement (Page et al., 2021), which provides a transparent and replicable framework for identifying, screening, and synthesizing relevant literature. Literature searches were conducted primarily through Google Scholar, supplemented by Scopus-indexed journal

databases, Crossref, and publisher repositories, to maximize both coverage and accessibility. The search employed combinations of the following keywords: “work-life balance,” “employee retention,” “turnover intention,” “Millennials,” and “Generation Z,” connected using Boolean operators (AND/OR). The initial search, conducted in 2026, yielded 486 records, which were supplemented by 34 additional records identified through citation tracking and manual searching of reference lists from key articles, yielding 520 records in total.

Eligibility criteria. Studies were included if they (a) were published in peer-reviewed academic journals between 2019 and 2026, with the substantial majority published within the last five years; (b) empirically examined the relationship between work-life balance and employee retention, turnover intention, job satisfaction, or organizational commitment; (c) sampled Millennial and/or Generation Z employees; and (d) were available in full text with an accessible and active digital object identifier (DOI). Studies were excluded if they focused exclusively on Generation X, Baby Boomer, or mixed-age samples without generational disaggregation, if they were conceptual papers lacking empirical data, or if they duplicated findings already captured by an included primary study.

Study selection process. After removing 122 duplicate records, 398 records remained for title and abstract screening. This screening excluded 279 records that were unrelated to work-life balance or retention constructs, or that sampled inappropriate populations, leaving 119 full-text articles assessed for eligibility. Of these, 94 were excluded for reasons including insufficient methodological detail, publication outside the defined time window, absence of a peer-review process, or conceptual overlap with already-included studies. This process resulted in a final sample of 25 studies retained for methodological quality appraisal, using an adapted checklist informed by the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT), assessing clarity of research questions, appropriateness of design, and adequacy of reporting. All 25 studies met the minimum quality threshold and were included in the final qualitative synthesis. Figure 1 presents the complete PRISMA 2020 flow diagram summarizing this selection process.

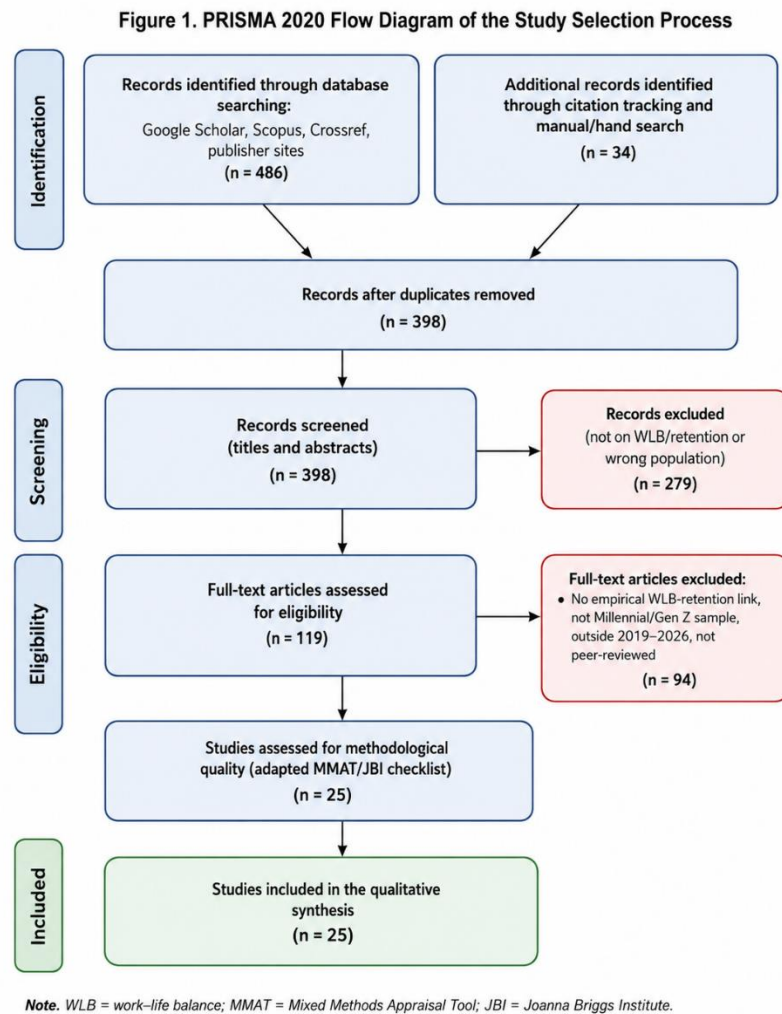


Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram of the article identification and selection process

Data extraction and synthesis. For each included study, the following information was extracted: author(s) and year, geographic context, generational sample, research design, key variables examined, and principal findings regarding the work-life balance-retention relationship. A narrative thematic synthesis approach was then applied, in which findings were grouped according to recurring themes: the direct relationship between work-life balance and retention/turnover intention; mediating mechanisms (job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job embeddedness); moderating mechanisms (employer branding, career development, compensation, self-efficacy); and generational comparisons between Millennials and Generation Z. This thematic synthesis forms the basis of the results and discussion presented in Section 3

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of Included Studies

The 25 studies included in this review span a wide range of geographic and organizational contexts, including Indonesia, Nigeria, Tanzania, Zambia, Ghana,

Portugal, and China, and cover sectors such as manufacturing, retail, education, start-ups, auditing, and public administration. The majority (18 of 25) employed quantitative survey-based designs using structural equation modeling or regression analysis, while the remainder combined systematic review methodologies or mixed-method designs. Publication years range from 2021 to 2026, with a pronounced concentration of studies published in 2024-2026, reflecting the accelerating scholarly interest in this topic following the widespread adoption of hybrid work arrangements and the emergence of phenomena such as quiet quitting in the post-pandemic labor market (Xueyun et al., 2023). Table 1 summarizes a representative selection of the included studies, their generational focus, and principal findings.

Table 1. Summary of Selected Studies on Work-Life Balance and Employee Retention

Author(s) & Year	Generation / Context	Design	Key Finding
Silaban & Margaretha (2021)	Millennials; Bandung, Indonesia	Quantitative survey	WLB positively affects job satisfaction and retention
Waworuntu et al. (2022)	Millennials & Gen Z; multi-country (SLR)	Systematic review	WLB and job satisfaction jointly enhance performance and retention
Rezeki (2023)	Millennials; automotive company	Quantitative survey	Work attachment mediates leadership, WLB, and intention to stay
Hendriana et al. (2023)	Gen Z; Indonesia	Quantitative survey	Employer branding moderates the WLB-retention relationship
Alves et al. (2024)	Auditors (mixed generation); Portugal	SEM survey (n=301)	Work overload reduces WLB, which reduces turnover intention
Tanoto & Tami (2024)	Gen Z; Indonesia	Quantitative survey	Job embeddedness mediates WLB effects on retention
Kusuma et al. (2024)	Millennials; Indonesia	Quantitative survey	WLB strengthens commitment, reducing turnover intention
Xueyun et al. (2023)	Gen Z; China	SEM survey (n=683)	Poor conditions and imbalance drive quiet quitting intention

Gustina et al. (2025)	Gen Z; start-up sector	Quantitative survey	WLB positively relates to job satisfaction in start-ups
Sari et al. (2025)	Millennials vs Gen Z (comparative)	Quantitative survey	Gen Z shows steeper engagement decline under imbalance
Al-Idrus et al. (2026)	Gen Z; Indonesia	Quantitative survey	Compensation, WLB, and satisfaction jointly drive retention
Putra et al. (2026)	Gen Z; Islamic education institutions	Quantitative survey	Career development moderates the WLB-retention link
Pózner & Kozák (2025)	Gen Z; global (SLR)	Systematic review	Autonomy, flexibility, and healthy WLB are key retention levers

Note. WLB = work-life balance; SLR = systematic literature review; SEM = structural equation modeling.

The Direct Relationship between Work-Life Balance and Retention

Across nearly all included studies, work-life balance emerges as a statistically significant and positive predictor of employee retention, and conversely, a significant negative predictor of turnover intention. Silaban and Margaretha (2021), studying millennial employees in Bandung, Indonesia, found that work-life balance directly and indirectly, through job satisfaction, enhanced retention. This finding is echoed by Lumelezi (2026) in the context of Gen-Y employees in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and by Kusuma et al. (2024), who demonstrated that work-life balance reduces turnover intention among millennial employees partly through strengthened organizational commitment. Similarly, among Generation Z samples, Qodriyah and Dwianto (2026) found that both work-life balance and compensation significantly reduced turnover intention among Generation Z employees in Jakarta, while Al-Idrus et al. (2026) reported comparable findings when compensation and job satisfaction were modeled alongside work-life balance as joint predictors of retention.

Beyond Southeast Asia, this relationship demonstrates notable cross-cultural robustness. Alves et al. (2024), studying auditors in Portugal, a profession notorious for extreme workloads, found that work overload was negatively associated with work-life balance, which in turn was negatively associated with turnover intention, with the relationship stronger in Big Four firms where workload pressures are most acute. Shibalatani and Hapompwe (2025) similarly found that generational moderation affected retention rates in audit firms in Lusaka, Zambia, suggesting that the salience of work-life balance as a retention driver may itself vary by professional context and generational composition of the workforce. Collectively, these findings affirm that the work-life balance-retention relationship is not an artifact of any

single national or organizational setting, but rather a robust empirical pattern replicated across highly divergent contexts.

Mediating Mechanisms

A central contribution of the reviewed literature lies in unpacking the mechanisms that transmit the effect of work-life balance onto retention outcomes. Job satisfaction emerges as the most frequently examined and empirically supported mediator. Silaban and Margaretha (2021) and Al-Idrus et al. (2026) both demonstrate that work-life balance enhances job satisfaction, which subsequently strengthens intention to remain with the organization. Organizational commitment functions as a second key mediator; Kusuma et al. (2024) show that employees who perceive stronger work-life balance develop deeper affective commitment to their organization, which in turn suppresses turnover intention.

Job embeddedness represents a third, increasingly prominent mediating mechanism, particularly salient among Generation Z samples. Rosita et al. (2024) and Tanoto and Tami (2024) both find that work-life balance strengthens job embeddedness, defined as the web of connections, fit, and sacrifice that binds an employee to an organization and community, which subsequently reduces turnover intention beyond what job satisfaction alone can explain. This is a theoretically important finding, as it suggests that for Generation Z employees in particular, retention may depend less on satisfaction with the job itself and more on the broader embeddedness created through flexible arrangements that allow employees to maintain meaningful ties outside of work. Work engagement and work attachment constitute additional mediating pathways; Rezeki (2023) demonstrates that work attachment mediates the relationship between transformational leadership, work-life balance, and intention to stay among millennial employees in an automotive company, while Sari et al. (2025) find generational differences in how work-life balance translates into work engagement, with Generation Z exhibiting a steeper sensitivity to imbalance than Millennials.

Moderating Factors and Boundary Conditions

Several studies identify boundary conditions that strengthen or weaken the work-life balance-retention relationship. Employer branding stands out as a particularly influential moderator for Generation Z. Hendriana et al. (2023) find that employer branding interacts with work-life balance to shape retention outcomes among Generation Z workers, suggesting that organizations perceived as authentic and values-aligned amplify the retention benefits of flexible policies. Career development opportunities represent a second recurring moderator; Putra et al. (2026) show that the influence of work-life balance on retention in Islamic education institutions is contingent on the availability of clear career progression pathways, while Nainggolan et al. (2025) similarly find that training and development jointly enhance the retention effects of work-life balance among millennial employees.

Compensation and welfare benefits also moderate this relationship, particularly in contexts of high workload. Milawati et al. (2026) document that HR strategies combining flexible working hours, leave policies, and welfare benefits produce stronger retention outcomes than work-life balance policies implemented

in isolation, while Syal et al. (2024) similarly find that reward systems amplify the mediating effect of job satisfaction on the relationship between work-life balance and retention among Generation Z employees in West Kalimantan. Finally, self-efficacy and individual psychological resources appear to buffer the negative effects of imbalance; employees with higher self-efficacy demonstrate lower turnover intention even under comparable levels of perceived work-life strain, suggesting that organizational interventions may fruitfully be complemented by resilience-building initiatives targeted at younger employees.

Generational Comparisons: Millennials versus Generation Z

While the overarching direction of the work-life balance-retention relationship holds across both cohorts, the reviewed literature reveals meaningful generational nuances. Millennials, having entered the workforce during or shortly after the 2008 global financial crisis, tend to weigh work-life balance alongside more traditional retention drivers such as job security, salary progression, and career stability (Oteng & Eyono, 2024; Isiaka & Whyte, 2026). For this cohort, work-life balance often operates as a complement to, rather than a substitute for, conventional HR levers. Generation Z, by contrast, having entered the workforce amid the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath, demonstrates a more pronounced and sometimes primary emphasis on autonomy, mental well-being, and purpose-driven work, with several studies documenting a greater propensity toward quiet quitting or rapid exit when work-life boundaries are perceived as violated (Xueyun et al., 2023; Gustina et al., 2025).

Sari et al. (2025), directly comparing the two cohorts on work engagement outcomes, find that Generation Z exhibits both higher baseline expectations for flexibility and a steeper decline in engagement when those expectations are unmet, compared to Millennials, who display comparatively greater tolerance for episodic imbalance provided that long-term career trajectories remain intact. This divergence carries important implications: retention strategies calibrated primarily around traditional benefits and career ladders, while still relevant for Millennials, may prove insufficient for retaining Generation Z talent, who appear to require more immediate, tangible, and continuously reinforced demonstrations of organizational commitment to work-life balance, including through employer branding and authentic organizational culture (Hendriana et al., 2023; Pózner & Kozák, 2025).

Toward an Integrative Framework

Synthesizing across the 25 reviewed studies, this review proposes an integrative framework in which work-life balance functions as a foundational antecedent that operates through parallel mediating pathways, namely job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job embeddedness, to influence retention and turnover intention, with the strength of these pathways moderated by employer branding, career development, compensation, and individual psychological resources such as self-efficacy. Critically, the relative weight of each pathway and moderator differs by generational cohort, with Millennials relying more heavily on the organizational commitment and career development pathway, and Generation Z relying more heavily on the job embeddedness and employer branding pathway. This integrative, generation-differentiated framework extends

beyond prior single-mechanism or single-generation studies and offers a more complete account of how organizations might design retention strategies that are simultaneously effective across a generationally diverse workforce.

Practical and Managerial Implications

The synthesized evidence carries several concrete implications for organizations seeking to strengthen retention among Millennial and Generation Z employees. First, flexible scheduling and remote or hybrid work options should be treated as baseline expectations rather than optional perks, particularly for Generation Z employees, for whom rigid, office-centric arrangements appear to accelerate disengagement and quiet quitting behaviors (Xueyun et al., 2023). Second, organizations should invest in visible, authentic employer branding that communicates genuine commitment to employee well-being, since Hendriana et al. (2023) demonstrate that perceived authenticity, rather than the mere existence of work-life balance policies, is what ultimately drives the retention benefit among Generation Z workers. Third, career development pathways should remain a parallel investment alongside work-life balance initiatives, especially for retaining Millennial employees, who, as shown by Putra et al. (2026) and Nainggolan et al. (2025), respond most strongly to combined offerings of flexibility and advancement opportunity rather than either in isolation.

Fourth, compensation and welfare benefit structures should be designed to complement, rather than substitute for, work-life balance policies. Milawati et al. (2026) and Syal et al. (2024) both suggest that bundled HR strategies, integrating leave policies, flexible hours, and welfare benefits, produce measurably stronger retention outcomes than any single intervention implemented in isolation. Fifth, given the evidence that job embeddedness functions as a particularly potent mediator for Generation Z, organizations may benefit from deliberately cultivating non-work-related social ties within the organization, such as mentorship programs, employee resource groups, and community-oriented events, that increase the psychological and social cost of departure beyond what salary or job satisfaction alone can achieve (Rosita et al., 2024). Finally, given documented differences in resilience and self-efficacy across employees exposed to similar levels of work-life strain, organizations should consider complementing structural work-life balance interventions with resilience-building programs, such as stress management training and psychological support services, to buffer against burnout-driven attrition, particularly in high-workload professions such as auditing, healthcare, and start-up environments (Alves et al., 2024; Gustina et al., 2025).

Taken together, these implications suggest that no single lever, whether flexible scheduling, compensation, branding, or career development, is sufficient on its own. Rather, sustainable retention of a generationally diverse workforce requires an integrated bundle of mutually reinforcing practices, calibrated to the differing priorities of Millennials and Generation Z, and continuously communicated through authentic organizational culture rather than isolated policy announcements.

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review synthesized 25 peer-reviewed studies published primarily between 2021 and 2026 to examine the role of work-life balance in employee

retention among Millennials and Generation Z. The evidence converges on a clear and robust conclusion: work-life balance is a significant positive driver of employee retention and a significant negative predictor of turnover intention across both generational cohorts and across highly diverse geographic and organizational contexts. This relationship operates through multiple mediating mechanisms, including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job embeddedness, and is further shaped by moderating factors such as employer branding, career development opportunities, compensation, and individual psychological resources. Importantly, this review identifies meaningful generational nuances: Millennials tend to integrate work-life balance alongside traditional retention drivers such as career stability, whereas Generation Z exhibits a more immediate and pronounced sensitivity to work-life imbalance, often channeled through job embeddedness and employer branding rather than conventional career incentives alone.

These findings carry direct practical implications for human resource management. Organizations seeking to retain a generationally diverse workforce should move beyond one-size-fits-all work-life balance policies and instead design differentiated, flexible interventions, including adaptable scheduling, robust leave and welfare policies, authentic employer branding, and continuous career development, that are responsive to the distinct expectations of Millennials and Generation Z alike. From a theoretical standpoint, this review contributes an integrative, generation-differentiated framework that extends prior single-generation or single-mechanism accounts of the work-life balance-retention relationship.

Several limitations warrant acknowledgment. First, this review relies predominantly on cross-sectional, self-reported survey data drawn from the included primary studies, which constrains causal inference. Second, geographic coverage remains skewed toward Southeast Asian and African contexts, limiting generalizability to other regions such as North America and Western Europe. Third, as a literature-based synthesis, this review is inherently bounded by the scope and quality of previously published research. Future research should pursue longitudinal and experimental designs to better establish causality, expand geographic and industry coverage, and further investigate emerging phenomena such as quiet quitting, hybrid work arrangements, and artificial-intelligence-mediated work redesign as they continue to reshape how Millennials and Generation Z negotiate the boundary between work and life.

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